**Hypertexts and Digital Literature**

**Abstract:** As the digital age progresses, its influence on art and creative product intensifies and ingrains itself within the status quo. With the radical, overwhelming changes digitization and widespread access to the Internet has brought, many overlook some of the smaller, yet nonetheless integral aspects of those changes. For instance, consider how mindless and miniscule a task clicking a link to a website is – one almost certainly isn’t actively thinking about clicking a given link each time one clicks a link, and it’s fairly likely that one doesn’t think very much about simply clicking links overall. While each distinct key press and each singular left or right click doesn’t necessarily contain a significant narrative, it is important to keep in mind that even the minutia of hypertexts and digital literature differ greatly from that of their traditional counterparts

In this course, students will examine hypertexts and digital literature, along with similar media and their predecessors. This examination will be analytical and critical, but also often exploratory. Students will have regular opportunities to engage with assigned works in manners that aren’t always possible to replicate when working with physical texts. Students will also be given chances to create their own digital works in order to achieve deeper comprehension of course concepts and topics. This course will additionally delve into concepts such as metatextuality, intertextuality, and to more general and superficial extent, it will also explore the digital humanities as a whole.

In addition to in-class discussion and assorted assignments, a key component of this course is the class blog. The blog is meant to serve as a group repository to share thoughts and ideas about class discussions or readings, as well as a general, secondary community outside the classroom. Students are strongly encouraged to be active on the blog, but the only blogging requirement is to fulfill the minimum number of blog posts (four posts).

Note: This syllabus contains information that will remain relevant throughout the semester. It will be referenced regularly, and a digital copy is available via the course website.

**Content Disclaimer:** This course may occasionally address potentially disturbing content, specifically in its more explorative portions. Use caution and discretion; students should know and respect their own personal limits. Students are encouraged to contact the instructor in the case that any course content is unacceptably upsetting to them.

**Course Requirements and Grading:** This course is primarily writing and/or creation-focused, rather than exam focused. In other words, this class will lack exams, with most non-reading assignments taking the form of a response paper or something equivalent. Class will generally often consist of a combination of discussion and examining material as a group. Regularly putting thought into responses and blog posts is essential here, as they will fuel class discussion to a significant degree. Additionally, of course, the “what you put into it, you get out of it” clause applies to this course as much as it does to any given course.

Below is an explanation of how one can be expected to be graded in this course, as well as some general expectations for conduct:

**Attendance and Participation (10%)**All students are expected to come to class prepared, ready and willing to participate in discussion, and on time. Additionally, students are expected to remain undistracted during class and to show respect towards one another as well as to the instructor. If a student is going to be absent, that student is expected to present a doctor’s note or other appropriate documentation excusing that absence. More than two unexcused absences during the duration of the semester will result in significant decrease in overall course grade.

**In-Class Presentation (10%)**At two points during the semester, students are asked to present in class. One of these presentations takes the form of an independent presentation on a week’s topic and readings, and the other takes the form of group presentation on a topic chosen from a list. More information will be given in class.

**Miscellaneous Assignments and Weekly Upkeep (15%)**Regularly throughout the semester, students are expected to post on the class blog. These posts do not need to be longer than 250 words, and they can take the form of reflection on a week’s subject matter, an account of a self-driven attempt to explore a week’s subject matter independently, a piece that poses thoughtful questions and prompts open discussion, or anything roughly equivalent to these. Students are welcome to augment their posts with media such as audio, external links, video, or visual aids. In any case, the posts should proofread and they should demonstrate understanding of the week’s material. By the end of the semester, each individual student should have at least four posts uploaded to the blog.

**Projects (25%)**Several larger-scale projects, usually spanning multiple weeks, are part of this course’s curriculum. These are expanded upon in-depth in the “projects” portion of this syllabus, and students will be provided with detailed handouts covering the specific expectations for each project when it is assigned.

**Final Project (40%)**At the end of this course, students will complete a final assignment. Students will be provided with detailed handouts covering the specific expectations for this project when it is assigned.

**Course Material – Traditional:** In the interest of accessibility, all required course material in this section will be made available either online on the course website, or through a course packet or handout.

* Alfred Jarry’s *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, Fasquelle ed. (.pdf available on course website)
* John Ray’s *New Adventures of Alice* (.pdf available on course website)
* Stephen Ramsay’s *Reading Machines: Towards an Algorithmic Criticism* (.pdf available on course website)
* Timothy Dexter’s *A Pickle for the Knowing Ones* (link to digital edition available on course website)
* Excerpts of Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* (.pdf available on course website)
* Excerpts of James’ Joyce’s *Ulysses* (first ed., .pdf available on course website)

**Course Material – Digital:** In the interest of accessibility, all required course material in this section is freely available online. Do note that digital readings are usually more exploratory than traditional ones – there is no expectation that a student read every article on *SCP Foundation*, for instance.

* *A Pickle for the Knowing Ones* (via LordTimothyDexter.com)
* Library of Babel
* *SCP Foundation*
* Siivagunner – YouTube channel
* *The Holders* series, via “Serene Knowledge” collection
* Twinery

**Recommended Texts:** These are suggested, mainly for the purposes of gaining background knowledge, but not required reading. They will not necessarily be included in the course packet, however. It should be noted that a number of these texts are exceptionally long. If you do choose to give them a look, you are absolutely not expected to read them in their entirety.

* Excerpts from Andrew Hussie’s *Homestuck* (Week 7)
* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus* (Week 3, Week 6)
* Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets* (Week 3)
* Roland Barthes’ *The Death of the Author* (Week 6)
* Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (available via handout) (Week 1, Week 5)
* Wayne Koestenbaum’s *Humiliation* (Week 6)
* Wildbow’s *Worm* (freely available online) (Week 4)
* *Antimemetics Division* series, SCP Foundation (Week 11)

**Course Schedule:**

* **Week 1: Introduction**
  + Consider: what is a hypertext? What is the relationship between hypertexts and other forms of literature and art? What is the scope of the term “hypertext?”
  + Read: Any two works in the “Choose Your Own Adventure” Selection on the course website. After reaching an ending for the first time in one of the works, read through that work once or twice more, aiming to take a different path.
* **Week 2: Proto-Hypertexts**
  + Consider: what makes a hypertext a hypertext? What makes a hypertext recognizable as such? Are “proto-hypertexts” – that is, pre-Internet hypertexts – true hypertexts?
  + Read: *Ulysses* selected excerpts, *Divine Comedy* selected excerpts
* **Week 3: Hypertext, Cybertext**
  + Consider: what effect does the way a reader navigates the text have on the text itself? What is the relationship between hypertext and what is simply prose that is on the Internet? Can the digitization and alteration a work give it hypertextual qualities?
  + Read: *Reading Machines: Towards an Algorithmic Criticism* (pages 1-18), *A Pickle for the Knowing Ones*, “Split Pickle” version. It is fully reasonable to skim this text due to its nature, but while reading, think about the transition from original work, to digital transcription, to altered transcription.
  + Begin: Intro Project.
* **Week 4: Digital Literature at a Glance**
  + Consider: what are the defining qualities of digital literature? What intrinsically separates it from traditional literature, aside from the obvious? Can “digital literature” as a category or genre stand on its own?
  + Read: *Reading Machines: Towards an Algorithmic Criticism* (pages 19-81).
* **Week 5: The “Project”**
  + Consider: what does the word “project” mean in the context of the digital age? What is the difference between a “project,” a “text,” and a “work,” and is there any overlap between them? Is there an intrinsic culture or set of norms that apply to working on or with projects, and how has this culture changed in the digital age?
  + Explore: Twinery. Find a game that looks interesting in the “Sample” selection, and play it for at least as long as it takes for you to form a cohesive opinion on it. Feel free to try another game if the one you choose is not to your liking. Write a short (roughly 250 word) response on your findings and experience, and come to class prepared to discuss what you played.
  + Due: Intro Project.
* **Week 6: Order, or Lack Thereof**
  + Consider: What is the importance of reading a text in the “correct” order? In a text with a “correct” order, what are the consequences of reading out of order, aside from the text simply not making sense? How does the experience of reading a text with a defined order differ from reading one where the reader is encouraged to read in a manner they choose?
  + Read: Rather than reading a specific piece, go to Library of Babel and spend 10-20 minutes exploring the website. Write a short (roughly 250 word) response on your findings and experience.
  + Begin: Mid-semester project.
* **Week 7: Archiving and Preservation in the Digital Age**
  + Consider: with “permanence” or a lack thereof in mind, what manners of keeping data are potentially least and most effective and why? Why are archiving and preservation important? Is there anything “performative” about digital archiving and preservation?
  + Play: Choose and play through any two Twine games from the Curated Twine Game Selection on the course website (for convenience: *The Temple of No, 16 Ways to Kill a Vampire at McDonalds, Cactus Blue Motel, The Play, The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo*. Be aware that the last one is definitively a horror game and is not for the faint of heart.). You don’t need to write a formal response, but come prepared to class prepared to discuss the games you played.
* **Week 8: Digital Permanence and Ephemerality, Redundancy and Falling Out of Favor**
  + Consider: what are the implications and ramifications of the fact that it took until 2020 for Adobe Flash to be fully decommissioned? What is the relationship between redundancy and ephemerality? Is there a balance to be struck between digital permanence and digital ephemerality – or in other words, how permanent is “permanent” in the digital age, online or otherwise?
  + Read: *The Holders* series, collected entries. *The Holders* series’ website once had an entry for all 538 objects, and was making its way towards 2538. However, the website that hosted them no longer exists. Perhaps there is a sort of metatextual parallel here: in the same way that the objects are spread out, waiting to be collected, in its current state, if one seeks to read all of the entries, one would have to seek archives far and wide.
    - Also, should you examine this week’s optional reading, remember that any page containing an embedded YouTube video at one point contained an Adobe Flash animation. Keep that in mind.
* **Week 9: Going Out of Style – Going Out With a Bang**
  + Consider: how big a role does fan culture play in the digital age? In what cases does it play the biggest role? Are there any cases where “participatory” fan culture ceases to be “participatory?”
  + Read: *New Adventures of Alice* (at least halfway through, you are heavily encouraged to read the whole piece), or a fanfiction of your choice. You don’t need to write a formal response on it, but familiarize yourself with the idea and “feeling” if possible of fanfiction.
    - Some food for thought: maybe this assignment is a sort of “mandatory” fan culture? Perhaps not, as you signed up for this class presumably voluntarily, and you may not be partaking in this assignment as a fan.
* **Week 10: The Intersection of Play and Narrative, Also Not-Quite Narrative**
  + Consider: What human actions and behaviors are explicitly solitary acts, which aren’t, and what occurs at the intersection of such actions and behaviors? How much can narrative be broken down before it becomes unrecognizable? How would you characterize the fundamental aspects of actions, behavior, play, and narrative – “narremes,” if you will?
  + Play: *Queers in Love at the End of the World*, and either *Cat Petting Simulator* or *The Domovoi* (heavily recommended, content warning for spiders). Feel free to play both of the latter two. Give the Siivagunner High Quality Video Game Rip Selection a look. The music may not be for you, but in any case, read the essay contained in the .pdf attached there and be prepared to discuss its contents.
  + Due: Mid-semester project.
* **Week 11: Metafiction, Speculative Fiction, and Beyond**
  + Consider: What are the limits of narrative, physically, subjectively, or otherwise? What is the future of narrative? How do we perceive “levels” of narrative?
  + Read: *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician* (selected excerpts). Make your way through SCP-5500, and prepare to discuss it in class. Explore the SCP Foundation website at your leisure (the SCP Foundation Selected Articles section on the course website may come in handy if you’re lost.)
* **Week 12: Bringing it All Together**
  + Consider: What can, and cannot be a narrative? With all you know now, what are the defining features of digital literature and hypertext? What “loose ends” do you feel need to be tied up?
  + Read: Choose a Twine game you didn’t play during week 7 and play through it. Revisit at least one other piece we’ve examined this semester to prepare yourself for the roundtable discussion next week. Additionally, schedule an appointment to meet with the instructor to discuss your final project.
* **Week 13: The Beginning of the End**
  + Consider: Was this course intellectually stimulating? How has what you’ve learned, for instance, during week 1, impacted your understanding of the content of week 12, or vice versa? What loose ends do you want to tie up?
  + Due: Roundtable discussion this week. Essentially, we will be running through each of the topics this semester and giving them a once-over, but with the knowledge of each of the other topics. We will also be discussing the final project in-depth as a class: come prepared with questions. Continue work on your final project.
* **Week 14: The Middle of the End**
  + Consider: Are you satisfied with what you’ve learned up to this point? If not, what’s left?
  + Due: Continue to work on your final project. Also, the end-of-semester celebration and final presentations are this week. Sign up to bring in food or supplies.
* **Week 15: The End of the End**
  + What’s next for you? How much do you think what you learned in this course will be helpful in your future, academic or otherwise?
  + Due: Final project.